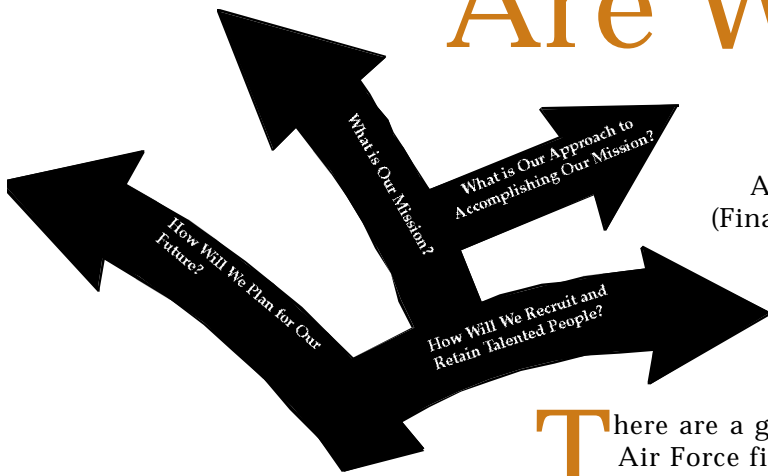


Where Are We Headed?

by Mr Robert F. Hale
Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Financial Management and Comptroller)



There are a great number of talented, dedicated people in the Air Force financial management community, and you are doing an excellent job of providing financial support to our service. When I visit our wings, I often hear commanders comment favorably on their FM support. I recently briefed the Secretary of the Air Force on financial management issues, and he mentioned that he, too, hears praise for your efforts during his travels.

But we must not take future success for granted. There is a lot going on in our community. Occasionally we need to step back from our day-to-day tasks and ask where we are headed and how will we get there. What is our mission? What is our approach to accomplishing our mission? How will we recruit and retain talented people? How will we plan for our future? Those are the questions I plan to answer in this article.

WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

I often hear commanders comment favorably on their FM support. But we must not take future success for granted.

A description of where we are headed should begin with our mission—what is it that we do to support the Air Force? At a recent planning session our senior FM leaders, along with a cross-section of base-level personnel, agreed on the mission statement shown below.

Air Force FM Mission Statement

We provide worldwide financial operations and management of Air Force resources necessary to defend the United States and protect its interests through aerospace power.

The Air Force FM mission statement is intentionally broad. It is broad in geographical terms, emphasizing the worldwide nature of our work. It is broad in terms of what we do—the phrase financial

operations describes a variety of tasks, ranging from financial services, to financial advice, to cost and economic analyses. Our mission statement emphasizes resource management because it is critical to the success of our service. Our FM mission statement ends by restating the Air Force mission—to defend the United States and protect its interests through aerospace power—in order to tie ourselves closely to our customer.

We have also identified the things we must do well in Air Force FM in order to accomplish our mission. These are our core competencies, and they are shown in the box below. Study these core competencies for a minute. I believe that each of you in Air Force financial management will see that you are a key part of our team.

Air Force FM Core Competencies

- Support Deployed Operations
- Formulate, Justify, and Execute Budgets
- Deliver Financial Services
- Provide Cost, Economic and Financial Analyses, and Advice
- Exercise Fiduciary Responsibility

As I look at our mission statement and core competencies, one thing is evident. What you do is vitally important to me in my role as comptroller and to the Air Force. I cannot fulfill my legally-mandated responsibilities unless you are diligent in your exercise of fiduciary responsibility—that is, unless you work to ensure that financial laws and regulations are obeyed. Our service cannot accomplish its mission without the financial services, budget formulation and execution, financial advice, and support of deployed operations that you provide. You are each a vital part of the Air Force team.

WHAT IS OUR APPROACH TO ACCOMPLISHING OUR MISSION?

What is our approach to accomplish this important mission of ours? If I were asked to describe our approach succinctly, I would use the three phrases that appear below in boldface type.

First, we will get (a little) smaller. Like most support organizations in the Air Force, we are trying to become leaner in order to free up dollars to help pay for maintaining the readiness of our forces and their modernization. The planned cuts in the total number of Air Force FM personnel are not large—less than 10 percent over the next four years—and they will not require any reductions-in-force or other such actions. They should not adversely affect promotion opportunities. The planned reductions are a challenge because we do not anticipate cuts in forces or other changes that will automatically lead to a reduced demand for what we do. If we are not careful, we will end up doing more with less.

But we are not going to do that. Instead we will get smaller smartly. By that I mean we will change our business practices in order to meet our mission needs with modestly fewer people and resources.

When I say meet our mission needs, I mean continuing to provide the many types of financial management support that are identified in our core competencies listed in the box above. In addition, we face some new or altered mission demands. For example, we face the challenge of providing full support for our deployed operations, including the EAFs. We also need to make improvements in financial management such as auditable financial statements.

How will we change our business practices to meet mission needs while getting modestly smaller? Many of you have seen the initial changes already. Most of our bases now have the Automated Business Services System (ABSS), which automates handling of commitment documents, and the Automated Purchase Card System (APCS), which handles financial transactions associated with the IMPAC card. The Employee/Member Self Service (E/MSS) system allows our personnel—civilians now, military soon—to

Where Are We Headed (Continued)...

make changes in routine pay information and discretionary allotments over the internet if they wish to do so. We have recently begun deploying versions of the Defense Travel System (DTS), which automates the processing of travel vouchers. Within the next few years we expect to automate leave processing with the LeaveWeb system and to begin installing a single-point-of-entry budget system known as FIRST. Nor is this the end of our efforts. We are constantly looking for new ways to change our business approaches in order to reduce workload while meeting mission needs.

Finally, we will always be here. Sometimes when I travel about our community I hear people wondering if we will, for example, eliminate our FSOs through automation. The answer is clearly no. We will achieve some modest reductions in numbers of personnel, but we will always need people to resolve the difficult issues in our FSOs and elsewhere. Moreover, especially in light of the increased pace of Air Force deployments, I believe we will always need a substantial number of blue-suit personnel in Air Force financial management to provide support to our deployed operations.

Look back at the box that lists our core competencies. The Air Force needs these tasks to be accomplished effectively if our service is to meet its mission. You will always be a vital part of the Air Force team.

HOW WILL WE RECRUIT AND RETAIN TALENTED PEOPLE?

We have demanding and important jobs, but we must also be sure that we attract talented people to perform them. We continue to recruit outstanding military and civilian personnel. Because during the next decade we are likely to have increased retirements among our senior civilian personnel, we are planning to increase the number of civilian interns entering through our Palace Acquire program.

Once people have joined our community, we must do a good job of training and professional development. To that end last year we published guidelines for professional development in the Air Force financial community (you can find them on our SAF/FM Home Page). They will tell you what you need to get ahead in our community in terms of breadth of experience, general education, professional and technical education, and test-based certification. Take a look at them and then, along with your supervisor, develop your own Individual Development Plan so that you can meet these guidelines.

HOW WILL WE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE?

One of the most difficult jobs for me, and probably for many of you, is to carve out enough time to plan for the future. There always seems to be an endless stream of issues that must be worked today and, therefore, take priority over planning for tomorrow.

But we must plan for our future, and we are. We completed strategic plans for the Air Force financial management community in 1996 and 1998. With the help of our current senior leaders and a selected group of base-level personnel, we are currently creating an Air Force FM Strategic Plan 2000 that should be available later this year. It will include the mission statement and core competencies identified in this article. In addition it will also specify goals that focus on solving current problems and actions that help us move toward meeting those goals. When that plan is complete, I look forward to sharing it with you.

A wise person once said: If you don't know your destination, any road will do. Fortunately, we in the Air Force financial management community do know our destination. We intend to be a vital part of the team that accomplishes the Air Force mission, and we are actively planning for our future. Thank you for joining in this important effort.

You are each a vital part of the Air Force team!